



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# AFGHANISTAN

## Health

June 2011



Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

*A doctor vaccinates an Afghan woman. More than 900,000 women and children receive health care services monthly through USAID-funded clinics and community health worker outreach activities.*

### HEALTH SNAPSHOT

- Approximately 10 million people have access to basic health services in 13 USAID-supported provinces
- Approximately 26 percent drop in child mortality since 2003
- More than 22,000 health workers trained, including pre-service training for midwives and community health workers and in-service training for doctors, midwives, nurses, and lab technicians
- More than 45,000 people receive health care services each day through clinics and outreach workers in 13 USAID-supported provinces
- USAID-supported polio surveillance has improved targeting of immunization and reduced incidence of disease

Data as of June 2011

### BACKGROUND

Afghanistan has one of the highest mortality rates in the world: each year, about one in five children dies before the age of five, and one out of every eight Afghan women dies from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. Average life expectancy is 42 years. While these statistics are tragic, we have seen progress. The 2006 Afghanistan Health Survey reported that nearly 60 percent of the population lives within two hours walking distance of the nearest health facility, up from nine percent in 2002. Infant mortality has decreased by 22 percent and child mortality has dropped by 26 percent since 2003.

### PROGRAM OVERVIEW

USAID has adopted a four-pronged approach to improving the health of the Afghan people, especially women and children:

- Meet the immediate healthcare needs of the population by supporting the provision of primary healthcare services
- Improve the health-related behaviors of individuals, families, and communities
- Increase demand for and access to quality health products and services through the private sector
- Address the long-term sustainability of the healthcare system by strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) at central and sub-national levels

### MEETING IMMEDIATE HEALTHCARE NEEDS

Working through MoPH-contracted and managed non-government organizations, USAID supports the delivery of essential health services and pharmaceutical assistance approximately 10 million people in 13 of the country's 34 provinces through the Basic Package of Health Services and the Essential Package of Hospital Services. On average, healthcare workers serve more than 870,000 clients per month at USAID-supported health facilities, and 76 percent of clients are women and children less than five years of age.

USAID supports regular in-service training programs for physicians, nurses, and midwives to ensure quality care at the facility level. To bring services to communities, USAID also trains community health workers. U.S. Government programs have trained nearly half of all volunteer community health workers practicing in Afghanistan.

Increasing access to skilled birth attendants is essential to improving maternal and child health. To date, 1,694 midwives have graduated from USAID-supported midwifery programs representing



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## Health (continued)



Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

*Professional midwives graduate. During Taliban rule, the practice of midwifery was banned. USAID has provided training to more than 22,000 health workers including midwives, doctors, nurses, and lab technicians.*



Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

*A lab technician in Touraghondi, Hirat Province provides lab results for patients.*

approximately 50 percent of all midwives in Afghanistan. This development has helped increase the number of trained midwives from 467 under the Taliban, to more than 3,250 today. As a result, use of antenatal care in rural Afghanistan has risen from an estimated eight percent in 2003, to 36 percent in 2008.

Afghanistan is one of four remaining countries in the world that has been unable to stop transmission of poliovirus. Insecurity along the border, especially in the south, has led to a shortage of health workers and an increase in polio cases from seven in 2004, to 38 in 2009. In 2010, 25 cases were reported and 10 confirmed cases have been reported in the first six months of 2011. To support national polio eradication efforts, USAID funds a nationwide polio surveillance system to detect, investigate, confirm, and respond to cases of acute flaccid paralysis, the signal condition for polio.

USAID also supports tuberculosis (TB) detection, treatment, and control efforts in both rural and urban settings in 13 target provinces using the Directly Observed Therapy, Short Course methodology, globally recognized as the best way to cure TB and control its spread.

### **BUILDING CAPACITY IN THE HEALTH SYSTEM**

USAID technical assistance to build MoPH financial, procurement and management systems enabled the Ministry to receive direct funding from the U.S. Government to support the delivery of health services in 13 provinces. USAID continues to provide technical support to the MoPH to improve its capacity to plan and manage activities, allocate resources, increase human capacity, strengthen health information systems, and monitor and evaluate the BPHS and EPHS programs.

### **INCREASING DEMAND FOR AND ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTH PRODUCTS AND SERVICES THROUGH THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

By expanding private sector distribution of selected socially marketed high-quality contraceptives, oral rehydration salts, and safe water solutions, USAID has helped make affordable health products more widely available to rural, low-income people. To disseminate public health messages and educate communities on issues such as the importance of birth spacing and diarrhea prevention and treatment, USAID programs support radio and TV spots, billboards, community health shuras, and mobile cinema. USAID is also supporting the MoPH in developing effective partnerships with the private sector to support quality and financially sustainable health services delivery, particularly in the hospital sector.

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